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PERSPECTIVE

The Fruits of Peace

Back in 1979, in the early days of Israeli-Egyptian peace, Congress approved a \$4.8-billion aid package to "support the process." Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) introduced an amendment to set aside money to promote scientific and technological cooperation between Israel and its Arab neighbors. The initial grant for the Waxman program was just \$50,000.

In the eight years since its creation, the program has brought Israeli and Egyptian scientists, academics and administrators together to work on common problems in health, agriculture and the environment. Cooperation has continued quietly beneath the din of political difficulties which have strained the peace. "We are not changing the major patterns," said one program participant. "We are trying to foster people-to-people interaction. The big changes will be made in the political arena."

The program has been administered from the outset by the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID). AID official Gerald Kamens explained that the fund is used to provide money for science-oriented projects initiated by non-governmental parties. Kamens said that "the program's real concern is to provide an opportunity for these people to interact with one another." Projects must have scientific and cooperation components and must be approved by the participant's government. Four multi-year projects have evolved as the principal recipients of Waxman program funds.

The Cooperation for Arid Land Agricultural Research (CALAR) program at San Diego State University coordinates a project which concentrates on how to coax pro-

ductive crops from the desert—a problem common to both Israel and Egypt. Researchers have already created strains of melon and tomato which may be grown using brackish desert groundwater.

A spinoff of the San Diego program is a New Jersey-based project which studies water pollution, lake management and seafood toxins. A project coordinated by the National Institutes of Health is conducting research in such animal- and insect-borne diseases as malaria and rift valley fever. The fourth project is coordinated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and studies cattle raising.

Although research is conducted independently in Israel and Egypt, steering committees from each country coordinate their work during small semi-annual meetings. In addition, researchers cooperate through consultations and replication of results and training.

The program began in 1979, but it was not until 1985 that Egyptian participants first traveled to Israel. Mohamed El-Assal, coordinator of the CALAR project, said that "the great majority" of Egyptians would not visit Israel until Israeli troops left south Lebanon and until the dispute over the Taba enclave in Sinai was resolved. The Egyptian government has occasionally approved cooperative projects but denied scientists passports to leave the country. Kamens explained that while these scientists tend to be "apolitical," they are subjected to political and economic pressures from fundamentalists and others opposed to Camp David.

AID has sought to limit publicity for the program to prevent a backlash against

Egyptian participants. "Too much publicity could kill the program," said Kamens. As a result, AID receives few requests to fund new projects.

Waxman and others believe that AID's passive approach must be changed to encourage the program's expansion. The Congressman has begun studying ways for the program to pursue new ideas more aggressively and which would be free from federal budget cuts. Although the program will receive a total of almost \$30 million by the end of 1987, funding levels have fluctuated over the years. AID officials have lowered their original 1988 request for \$5.8 million to \$5 million due to constraints on the federal budget.

Waxman told a recent conference sponsored by the Center for Social Policy in the Middle East of the Heller School of Brandeis University that the time has come for a new approach: "Now that regional cooperation has proven itself, we must become more ambitious. For the fact is that the present program is tiny. It has reached only a few hundred scientists. . . . Regional cooperation must begin to behave in a more activist way—not simply channeling money to the same projects year after year but reaching out to new participants in new fields."

El-Assal is not surprised that Egyptian and Israeli scientists have worked together despite the political maelstrom that so often swirled about them. "These scientists are looking forward to any excuse for cooperation and peace. Down deep everybody is sick of conflict and wars and looking for any way to begin a new chapter of peace."

—J.R.
